

# TWO VIEWS OF THE ALBERTA

by Dirk L. Schaeffer

In their astonishment over the upset Progressive-Conservative victory in the recent Alberta elections, political commentators appear to have lost sight of the finer details of these election results. This is hardly surprising: after a landslide, little can be observed but that it has happened. Nevertheless, digging among the rubble may turn up a few nuggets.

In Edmonton, and throughout the province, the landslide PC victory can be interpreted in either of two ways: 1) voters wanted PC, or 2) voters wanted to get rid of Social Credit. All indications, including the PC campaign (which offered little but a "change") and their post-election insecurity ("well, we haven't really thought about that yet") suggest that the second of these two possibilities is by far the most likely. If that is true, however, it is clear that voters in Edmonton and throughout the province had at least two courses open to them: to vote PC, or to vote for the New Democratic Party, which also ran candidates in most ridings. (I'll discount the possibility of voting Liberal for two reasons: actual returns indicate that it didn't occur to any but the smallest minority of voters, and Liberal campaigning suggests it didn't really occur to the Liberals either.) Since the PC's won by an overwhelming majority, there is little to say about them, except to examine their relative weak areas on a riding-by-riding basis: I'll leave that to their analysts. The NDP alternative appears more interesting; and by focussing on that party, I want now to examine whether its fortunes in Edmonton can tell us anything about the "Edmonton voter", other than that, as we know, he went overwhelmingly PC.

What happened to the NDP in Edmonton? Across the province, NDP accounted for 11.85% of the popular vote; in Edmonton's 16 ridings, NDP did somewhat better, accounting for 13.35% of the popular vote. In exactly half of the ridings, the NDP percentage exceeded its provincial level, in the other half it fell below that level. Thus it is clear that at least half of Edmonton accepted the NDP alternative more readily than did most Albertans. Similarly, Socred's fared far worse in Edmonton than throughout the province; there is not a single Edmonton riding in which the Socred candidate received his party's provincial percentage.

Is there any pattern to these differences in NDP showing in Edmonton ridings? One obvious place to look is in the nature of the incumbent in any riding at the time of the election; this can be used as a rough gauge of "party strength" in that riding. In the three Edmonton ridings in which one of the candidates was a PC incumbent, the NDP accounted for 7.57% of the popular vote. In the six ridings in which no incumbent stood for election, NDP took 12.68% of the popular vote. And in the seven ridings in which a Social Credit incumbent was running for re-election, NDP accounted for 17.13% of the popular vote. Clearly, then, where Social Credit was strongest, Edmonton voters went more readily NDP; where PC's were strong, the voters went almost entirely PC, rather than NDP.

These findings reinforce the impression that Edmonton voters were out to dump the Socreds: where any easy and viable alternative to Social Credit was available, and PC was certainly both of those, they grabbed at it; where SC was strong (or no easy alternative appeared) they went either PC or NDP, just as long as it wasn't Socred. (Liberals too appear to have done relatively better in strong Socred ridings than they did elsewhere.) If this is a real pattern, however, we should find corroboration in Calgary.

Calgary voters generally rejected NDP more strongly than Edmontonians did; the NDP share in that city was only 10.41% of the popular vote, and only in 5 of Calgary's 13 ridings did the NDP take more than its provincial share (11.85%) of the vote. Nevertheless, the pattern appears identical with Edmonton's: in 3 ridings where a PC incumbent stood for re-election, the NDP took 6.30% of the popular vote; in 6 ridings with no incumbent, the percentage rose to 11.00; and in the 4 ridings in which an SC incumbent was running for re-election, NDP took 12.87% of the popular vote. Further, since Calgaryans elected 4 Socreds, an even finer breakdown of this pattern is available for that city. We can now set up six groups of ridings according to whether there was a PC, a SC, or no incumbent, and according to whether PC or SC were elected. One of these groups has no members, since no Socreds were elected from ridings in which there was a PC incumbent. For the other five, the results are as follows: PC-inc., PC-el: NDP share 6.30% no-inc, PC-el: NDP 9.20%; SC-inc, PC-el: NDP 11.53%; no-inc, SC-el: NDP 15.08%; SC-inc, SC-el: NDP 14.55%. Thus, with the exception of the slight and insignificant reversal in the last two figures, NDP strength in Calgary appears to grow directly with Socred strength. And the latter was considerable: in only three Calgary ridings did the Socred share of the votes fall below their provincial percentage.

Another way to approach this question is to calculate the correlation between NDP and Socred percentages across the 16 ridings in Edmonton, and the 13 ridings of Calgary. This can be done by listing the ridings in order from largest to least NDP percentage, and again in order of largest to least Socred percentage, and then using statistical techniques to measure the extent to which these two listings match (i.e., that a riding with a large NDP turnout will also show a large Socred turnout.) The resulting correlation coefficient for Edmonton is .15 suggesting that the relationship between NDP and Socred strength is slight, and not statistically significant (that is, a relationship of this degree of strength could easily have come about as a result of chance factors.) For Calgary, the correlation is .58, however, which is large and highly significant. Thus we may conclude that the indicated relationship between NDP and Socred percentages applies directly in Calgary, but that in Edmonton other forces are at

work as well.

One possible explanation for these findings is based on the additional fact of the PC landslide in Edmonton, which had no real counterpart in Calgary, where four Socreds found office. It is as if Edmonton voters were out to swamp Socreds out of existence, and felt that this would require a very strong push on their part. Thus most went PC, as the likeliest alternative, as the alternative that showed the best chance of winning, although many also went NDP (and some Liberal) as alternatives to Socred. The Calgary situation differs markedly, however: here it is almost as if the voters recognized on the morning, rather than the evening, of election day, that the Socreds had gone into opposition; and they elected a basically PC government, with responsible Socred opposition. Across ridings in Calgary, where voters went in sizable numbers for opposition (meaning Socred), they went sizably NDP; in Edmonton, where PC's were still regarded as opposition, voters went less consistently NDP when they wanted to express opposition.

A glance at the relative effects of the Liberal candidates reinforces that impression. Since Liberals accounted for so few votes, there does not seem to be much purpose in breaking these down across ridings; instead, we may look at what effect the presence of a Liberal candidate in any riding had on the NDP percentage. In Edmonton, Liberals ran in 9 ridings, and in these ridings the NDP took 12.73% of the popular vote. Seven ridings ran only three candidates each; here the NDP took 14.16% of the popular vote. This difference, about 1.4% of the popular vote, is almost identical with the Liberal share of the vote across Alberta (1.2%) suggesting that in the Edmonton ridings, the NDP took what would have been the Liberal's share of the vote, had the Liberals run a candidate. Or, put another way, voters appeared not to have distinguished between NDP and Liberals, in Edmonton: both were merely not-Socreds and that mattered more than any other distinctions. In Calgary, again, the picture is reversed: in the eight three-candidate ridings, NDP took 8.94% of the popular vote; in the five in which four candidates ran (4 Liberals, 1 Independent), NDP took 12.95% of the popular vote. Thus we find that in Calgary there is repeated evidence of the fact that the stronger the competition (in the pre-election sense, when Socreds were the competition) the better NDP does, indicating that in the city, NDP candidates got votes because the voters wanted to vote NDP. In Edmonton, on the other hand, NDP got votes because the voters wanted to avoid Social Credit. It now appears consistent with that hypothesis that NDP made a stronger showing in Edmonton than in Calgary; not because the party was more popular here, but because anti-Socred sentiment ran higher.

Is it possible, from the limited data at our disposal, to find any corroboration for this hypothesis? Perhaps, if we draw on the "image" projected by the parties in their bids for the electorate's votes. The Socred image could briefly be described as "what else?", after 36 years, what alternative is there? In addition, they dangled a few goodies (home-buyer's bonus) in front of the voters; but there was nothing new or even specific in the offering. The PC image, keyed to change but without any specification of what the change was to consist of, could probably be best described by a cynical "more of the same—with a different name." The NDP projected its typical humanistic, egalitarian image, keyed to concern for people rather than politics. It emphasized youth, equality, concern. The Liberals failed to mount any consistent image.

These images can be fleshed out by looking at several variables for which fairly consistent data are available: age, education and sex. The *Edmonton Journal* of Thursday, August 26, 1971, printed capsule biographies of all Edmonton candidates, which I have drawn upon for the following summary.

Age: The average age of those 14 Socred candidates in Edmonton that admitted their age was 46.8 years; the actual average may be half a year or so higher; of the 14 PC's that have given their age, the average was 37.5; again, the actual average may be as much as a year or year-and-a-half higher. The nine Liberals averaged 37.9 years, while the 16 NDP candidates averaged 33.8 years. Clearly, the NDP was far younger than all other parties; 5 or so years younger than Liberals and PC's, 13 years younger than the Socreds. With the exception of one 29-year-old, Socred ages ranged from 35 to 62, with seven of their sixteen candidates over 50 for the PC's (with the exception of 23-year-old Dave King and perhaps Gerry Amerongen, who gave no figure) the range was 30 to 47; for the NDP, with the exception of 22-year-old Tim Christian, the range was 28 to 44. Discounting Liberals, the NDP candidate was the youngest in 11 ridings, oldest in 1; the Socred was the oldest in 11 ridings, the youngest in 1. PC's were youngest in 2 ridings, and oldest in 2. Thus, in terms of this variable, the parties seem to differentiate among themselves in a manner that perfectly reflects the popular stereotypes: the Socreds are old and paternalistic, the NDP young and enthusiastic, the PC middle-aged, middle-of-the-road, bland.

Did the candidate's age affect the voter's response? It's difficult to answer that question clearly, since so many other factors, riding, by riding, can fall into the picture. We can find the following data: the PC's only under-thirty candidate, Dave King, made the poorest showing of any PC candidate in Edmonton, with only 40% of the vote in his riding. The seven over-50 Socreds ranked 15, 14, 13, 12, 6, 3, and 1 among Socred percentages in Edmonton ridings (the "3" ranking occurring in Highlands, against the PC's 23-year-old). The average of these seven rankings is just over 9, suggesting age hurt the Socreds a little. The five NDP candidates aged 30 or younger ranked 14, 12, 8, 2, and 1 among NDP percentages, for an average of just over 7, suggesting age did them no harm. But these numbers are so variable that they are hardly done justice by an average. The rank-order correlation, in Edmonton, of age of the NDP candidates, the older ones may have done slightly better than the younger.

The general pattern in Edmonton thus is a middle-aged, image which the PC's project wanted; even within the Socred and NDP preferred middle-age candidates, though this slight effect within the NDP. The smallest fact of the 48 candidates of the three major parties in the range of 31-47 years, voters put only Amerongen) into office. If Amerongen falls out was perhaps wise to keep silent about

We may also ask if the youth vote, the 1 allowed to vote for the first time in this election. As we have seen, NDP, project a young voter to garner many votes in this manner. A closer look in the absence of census breakdowns, a statistical rough guess can be made, however, if entertained: that young voters vote as young older voters do, and that many young voters are stations close to the University. We looked at station, in Whitemud riding, which contains polling stations located at the Gallop, Mc public schools were selected out as big close addition to those in the Lansdowne school University's married student housing. In the those stations, the NDP candidate took 10. compared to only 5.38% throughout the remainder both cases it appears that the youth vote—o University youth vote—could have limited minority parties: the numbers given above have affected the PC or Socred candidates but however, that even in the "youth" vote, the N reach that party's provincial average perhaps, cut into his margin. Or perhaps based on the P that riding appeared more hotly than most other two candidates to the side.

Education: it is difficult to get precise data the biographies given, since not all gave specific however that about one-half of the Socred candidate degree, and roughly the same number (9) of them appeared to have only two candidates who did Bachelor's degree. Again, these results correspond 5 of the 8 Socreds who may not have degrees over-50's group, clearly represent an educational Education was not felt to be a requirement for the NDP, the split seems more likely to be egalitarian bias. The PC's of course continue to administrator image: virtually all their candidates degrees, since that is now almost a requirement (who may not have degrees made among the poorer candidates in Edmonton.) Similarly, candidates specific managerial or administrative experience qualifications.

Sex: The NDP ran three female candidates Socreds two, PC's one. Again, this is to reflect small numbers can, the parties' proportions. female NDP candidates in Edmonton accounted for percentage of the votes in her riding: she ranked 16, 12, and 10 among Edmonton relative NDP strength; and the (that she Atterbury) ran against a female Socred incumbent two Socred females ranked 12 and terms of of Socred votes: the better of the (Irene against the lone female PC (Catherine Chak) by percentage points of the provincial turnout the fact that she was running against another female candidate made one of the top show Edmonton. It is thus apparent that Edmonton Alberta) females stood a chance (when rural females, and Women's Lib stood none at all.

In Calgary, the only three female candidates running were members of the NDP; ranked terms of relative NDP showing in that city; none, the NDP did provincially. Thus, Calgary voters are more willing to accept a female candidate than do Edmonton (Miss Hunley's success in Rocky Mountain House ascribed to other factors, which in case were overcome the apparent handicap of sex).

All three of these variables (age, education, and sex) to confirm our original conclusion: Edmonton voters wanted to get away from Socred government, and they chose the blandest alternative was available much more than in Calgary, small conservative party to control the voters who, with exception (Dave chose the most middle-aged, middle-aged, manager indistinguishable of the candidates available. With specific, we find some additional corroborative remarks that the popular vote does matter: the NDP percentage was relatively low, the vote voting for NDP candidates and the PC image. Larger NDP percentages paradoxically seem to represent rejection of Social Credit government since by an image was rejected also. An unhappy coincidence.

Just for the record, I might mention that despite attention paid the NDP in the provincial election, I am not a member of the NDP or any party. As a human, I may not vote in Canada for any party. As a human, I don't for fear of losing my vote.